

# PLANT THIS, NOT THAT

## NATIVE ALTERNATIVES TO INVASIVE SPECIES IN SC

Over the last 200 years or so, invasive-exotic plants that are non-native species have been introduced into urban and rural forests as ornamental landscape plants, erosion control and support for wildlife habitat.

Though many introduced plants are harmless, a small cohort of these exotics escape the planted environment, leak into our forests and become major invasive problems.

Invasive plants threaten the natural integrity of South Carolina forests as they often out-compete native trees, shrubs and plants for light, space, water and nutrients in their natural communities. Serious invasive plant problems increase maintenance costs for landowners and communities alike and compromise biodiversity.

Plant native trees, shrubs and other plants in South Carolina. If you identify invasive species on your property, take action to remove plants and control their spread. For more information on identifying, managing and controlling invasive-exotic plants, contact Forestry Commission Forest Health Coordinator David Jenkins at [djenkins@scfc.gov](mailto:djenkins@scfc.gov) or David Coyle with the Clemson Invasive Species Program at [dcoyle@clemson.edu](mailto:dcoyle@clemson.edu).



European privet has lanceolate-shaped leaves that are thick, waxy and glossy. (Photo by Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org)



Japanese privet has oval-shaped leaves that are larger than Chinese privet's. (Photo by Michasia Dowdy, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org)



Chinese privet has small, oval-elliptical shaped leaves with a fleshy green texture and bright green color. (Photo by Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org)



**SPECIES TO REMOVE,  
AVOID PLANTING**

### Privet (*Ligustrum* spp.)

Three species of privet, Chinese (*Ligustrum sinense*), European (*Ligustrum vulgare*) and Japanese (*Ligustrum japonicum*), are all listed as invasive-exotic threats to urban and rural forests of South Carolina. These plants are native to China, Japan and Europe and were introduced for use as ornamental hedgerows, erosion control and wildlife plantings. Privet can be found in all counties of South Carolina, commonly invading forests, agricultural fields, roadsides and urban areas. Privet is fast-growing, multi-stemmed and can grow as a small shrub or small tree.

### Identification

Though each privet species differs in one or more physical characteristics, they share a few main attributes, including:

- All privet species have oppositely arranged leaves;
- Attractive, fragrant, tiny white flowers appear in late spring;
- Clusters of small, rounded, dark purple berries persist throughout the winter;
- Chinese privet has small, oval-shaped, semi-evergreen leaves with a fleshy feel;
- Smooth, light gray bark and twigs of Chinese privet are covered with characteristic, white-dotted lenticels used in gas exchange;
- European privet is popularly used as an ornamental hedge, favored for its evergreen, thick, glossy, lanceolate-shaped leaves and dense, leafy branches;
- Japanese privet is the largest privet and has dark-green, thick, waxy, oval-shaped leaves. This tree has been planted extensively as a yard ornamental and commonly forms a small tree habit.

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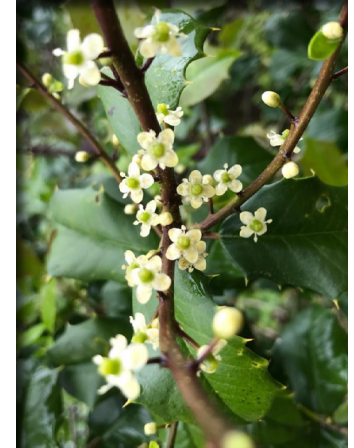
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### Interesting facts

- Privet has been planted in the U.S. since the mid-1800s;
- Privet is extremely prolific and has adapted to many different sites with variable light and soil conditions;
- Chinese privet spreads in two different ways: by animal-dispersed seed and vigorous sprouting of new plants from roots;
- Privet can have year-round evergreen leaves or semi-evergreen leaves with a partial leaf drop;
- Though privet does provide some shelter for wildlife, it does not contribute much nutritionally to the ecosystem. Its nectar and berries are low in nutrients, often leaving birds and pollinators malnourished;
- If ingested, privet berries are toxic to humans while the leaves are toxic to animals and insects.



American holly leaves. (Photo  
by the South Carolina Forestry  
Commission)



American holly flowers. (Photo  
by the South Carolina Forestry  
Commission)



### NATIVE ALTERNATIVE TO PRIVET

#### American holly (*Ilex opaca*)

American holly is a slow-growing, medium-sized native evergreen tree with a pyramidal shape, stout branches and thick, dark green, spine-tipped leaves. American holly typically grows to a height of 15 to 25 feet; however, this tree sometimes grows to 50 feet or more. American holly is primarily an understory tree and is found naturally growing in moist soils, especially near streams and riverbanks. This tree also tolerates drier, upland sites. There are numerous ornamental varieties of hollies grown for aesthetics, shade and screening/hedges. American holly produces attractive, bright red berries that attract many songbirds, small animals and pollinators. This tree is adaptable to various soil textures and is considered resistant to deer.

#### Identification

- Pyramidal form;
- Simple, evergreen, spine-tipped leaves;
- Light gray, smooth bark;

- Small, fragrant white flowers are produced in spring;
- Clusters of small, vibrant red berries support birds and pollinators;
- Stout branches.

### Interesting facts

- American holly plays a vital habitat role, as its berries provide a valuable winter food source for many birds, including robins, cedar waxwings and bluebirds; American holly also provides shelter and nesting for many birds;
- American holly wood's whitish, fine-textured wood is highly sought after by woodworkers and commonly used in crafting cabinetry, furniture, handles, rulers and musical instruments;
- American holly is a symbol of Christmas. Its dark green, glossy leaves and bright berries are commonly fashioned into wreaths that symbolize good luck and protection;
- Holly's distinctively spine-tipped leaves are a natural defense mechanism against herbivores;
- Throughout history, American holly has been a source of inspiration for artists and writers;
- Though American holly thrives in mild climates, it is considered the hardiest broadleaf evergreen, capable of weathering extreme cold temperatures reaching lows of -10 degrees;
- American holly is known for its longevity and resilience. When properly cared for, American holly can live over 300 years.